

**Testimony Submitted by Niema Saunders to the Housing Committee**  
**SB 291: “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes”**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**March 10, 2022**

Good morning Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, ranking members, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Niema Saunders. I’ve been in child care for a little over 20 years. I have experience homeschooling and offering care to children with developmental disabilities. I relocated to Connecticut and now live in New Haven. I am writing in support of SB 291 “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes”.

When I moved to my current home I choose it specifically because it had been converted from a two family house. When I signed my lease, there was an addendum added attesting that my landlord was aware that I would be operating a home-based child care program and to confirm that they would make adjustments to the property. This would allow me to operate my child care program on the first level of my home. Before I could open, I had several issues with my landlord. I didn’t know how to approach the situation. There were several things that were supposed to be put in place that would make the home safe for the children.

There was always glass around the property. I would clean it and it would resurface, but the landlord wasn’t willing to fix it. I put a clause in our contract that said that the landlord was aware that I was operating a child care business. The landlord initially seemed like they were on board, but issues kept coming up. These issues delayed the opening of my program over 2 years. Eventually, I purchased a storage unit because I had so much stuff for the children. I’d even set up a nursery room. It cost me a lot of money out of pocket. As a start up you don’t always have collateral funds. I put in at least \$15,000 into my business.

In order to operate a family child care program in Connecticut you must be licensed by the Office of Early Childhood. I can’t have a licensing inspector come out if things are not in order. I could potentially be cited. My landlord would say I’ll come out and fix it today and then it would be a month. Without the modifications, I didn’t feel comfortable having the children play outside. Now if I want to open up the location I would need to find another property because there are still existing issues with the landlord.

It’s frustrating because I can’t provide services to children in my community who don’t have access to care or young children with disabilities. My goal was to bring high quality education to the community. To make sure that children are doing more than just sitting in front of a tv.

I wasn't able to open my program and I didn't get back any investment from my landlord. If it was just a space that I rented it wouldn't be an issue to relocate. But once you start to paint and reassemble everything it becomes a home. I even thought about a group family child care because I had the space. But all of the effort just to start a program to care for 6 children made me second guess going through zoning to expand to group.

I am urging you to support SB 291 to ensure that educators don't have to go through the challenges that I went through.

Thank you for your time.

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